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ART. XII. — CRITICAL NOTICES.

1. — *Observations on the Oriental Plague, and on Quarantines, as a Means of arresting its Progress, addressed to the British Association of Science, &c.* By JOHN BOWRING. Edinburgh. 1838. pp. 45.

THE observations of Dr. Bowring were offered to the British Association in compliance with a unanimous request of that body ; and it was also unanimously resolved, to recommend to the government the appointment of a commission to complete the investigation of the questions of which his paper had treated.

Dr. Bowring thought it necessary to apologize for what he calls his intrusion upon medical ground. It must, however, be a very narrow feeling, that would demand such apologies from those who have important truths to communicate. The science of Medicine has gained some of its most brilliant results by listening to the suggestions of those who were not its professed students. It was from the observations of simple rustics, that Jenner took the first hint of vaccination. The ingenious idea of injecting the Eustachian tube, in cases of deafness, was suggested, and put in practice upon his own person, by a postmaster of Lyons. Many, who have hung in rapture over the pages of "Faust" and "Werter," are ignorant, that Goethe was the discoverer of the intermaxillary bone in the human embryo, and one of the first who developed the singular doctrine, now received among the truths of transcendental anatomy, that the cranium is but a series of vertebræ, modified from the original type to accommodate the expanded nervous columns.

Unfortunately, those who have nothing to add to a complicated science, with which mankind and womankind are prone to meddle, are seldom troubled by any modesty in announcing their vagaries. But we must pardon the reverend homœopath, who inflicts upon the English public his infinitesimal doses of sense, diffused in copious pages of absurdity, and we must endure the *physiological* apostles of our own land, who grow fat by starving their disciples, rather than look with jealousy upon those whose freedom from prejudices, whose very ignorance of supposed truths, may be the surest safeguard from error. Especially should we value the general views, taken by enlarged minds, of the subjects, which engross, with minute details, the attention of those whose lives are devoted to their study.

We are happy, therefore, to see a man of intelligence and information, like Dr. Bowring, entering the domain of the medical philosopher. We are especially gratified, when the subject handled is one of general interest, and the opportunities for its study have been as favorable as in the present instance.

Is the Plague contagious? Are Quarantines a protection against it? Such are the questions raised in the pamphlet before us.

The first question has long been answered by the popular voice, and generally by the professed writers on the subject, in the affirmative. The readers of Boccaccio and Defoe may therefore be surprised to find, that the whole tendency of Dr. Bowring's observation is directly opposed to the prevailing belief; that many of the most competent medical observers confirm his opinions; and that special facts in great numbers are not wanting, to prove that it is an exceedingly difficult, if not an impossible thing, to communicate the plague by actual contact with those suffering from it. How then has this terrible doctrine of the extreme contagiousness of the plague, the most appalling idea connected with this form of pestilence, obtained so general a credence?

Without denying the possibility of the disease being communicated under certain circumstances, we can easily account for the exaggerated fears, which have so long been entertained. Men must have a cause for every fatal epidemic. They cannot consent to die in large masses, unless the most satisfactory reasons for it can be assigned. We, who have lived in the time of cholera, have seen enough to convince us of this. The disease was caused by contagion; it was produced by swarms of insects; it was the result of atmospheric conditions, shown by a certain aspect of the clouds; it was the evidence of an adynamic and exhausted condition of the race, produced by the degeneracy of our social habits; it was the work of physicians, who poisoned the wells of the great cities. These, and a thousand similar absurdities, have been most widely believed, and have led to the most painful results, in many cases. The physician has been murdered by the populace, upon his errand of mercy, and the interests of nations have been sacrificed to a baseless apprehension of danger. We cannot think it strange, that the plague, which has been so much more terrible in its ravages than even the cholera, and which has prevailed most among ignorant nations and in the less enlightened ages, should have been invested with the worst of attributes which a disease can possess, and one which so easily explains every thing to those, who receive evidence with strong faith and feeble judgment. Only let it be advanced, that an epidemic disease is

contagious, and facts will seem, to the careless observer and the terrified subjects of its visitation, to render it evident as the day. A district, the local circumstances of which call into action the general pestilential cause, is attacked, or the members of a family, living under one roof and subject to the same hygienic influences, are successively invaded, and the case of transmission can almost always be apparently made out. But, as it is next to impossible absolutely to seclude an individual, still less a community, from direct and indirect communication, the negative of the question is extremely difficult to establish.

The facts, brought forward by Dr. Bowring and one of his correspondents, are certainly strongly opposed to the contagiousness of the disease, under the circumstances where these observations were made. It must, however, be remembered, that a disease, arising from general causes, may, under certain conditions, acquire a capability of transmission from one individual to another. Doubtless much of the apparent contradiction in the history of the propagation of certain diseases may be traced to this circumstance. The confusion of two or more diseases under the same name is another source of error on this point. Such has been peculiarly the case with *typhus*, under which term seem to have been included at least two distinct affections, and which has seemed at times eminently transmissible, at others purely endemic or epidemic. With regard to the plague, using the term to include the pestilences so distinguished in different ages and countries, we are in want of fuller materials to determine the identity of the affection, and the circumstances, if such there be, which determine its capacity of transmission. Allowing their full value to the facts stated by Dr. Bowring, we cannot forget, that, in other times and places, the disease called plague has appeared but too clearly transmissible, and that, in the dreadful pestilence of Marseilles, the chain of its propagation was traced too accurately to admit of its independence of contagion.

Dr. Bowring's observations relate principally to the plague as found in Egypt. We refer to his pamphlet, which we hope may be reprinted in this country, for many interesting facts, showing the complete impunity with which the disease has been solicited and defied, under the influence of affection, of benevolence, of science. The opinions of intelligent physicians, familiar with the subject, coincided with his own. The following words, which we quote from the "*Dictionnaire de Médecine et de Chirurgie Pratiques*," published in 1834, may be compared with an extract from the pamphlet of Dr. Bowring.

“La peste est éminemment contagieuse.” — “Ce sujet a besoin d’être étudié par un homme d’un jugement sûr, et d’un esprit impartial. Qui pourrait mieux s’en acquitter que notre savant compatriote, le docteur Clot Bey ?”

“Ere long, a very distinguished physician, Clot Bey, who is at the head of the medical department in Egypt ; a man whose services to knowledge and humanity in that country outstrip all meed of praise, and who has treated thousands of cases of plague ; will publish his observations on the subject. I found his opinions wholly opposed to those of the contagionists. He assured me, that, in the innumerable facts of which he had cognizance, he had found irresistible evidence against the prevalent opinion as to the contagious character of this disease ; that, removed from the regions of malaria or miasmata, he had never known the plague to be communicated by contact ; that all his attempts to communicate the disease had failed ; that he had twice inoculated himself from plague-patients, without receiving the disorder ; that the experiments made of wearing the clothes of those who had died of the plague, had shown the difficulty, if not the impossibility of communicating the disease ; that he deemed lazarettos and quarantines not only useless, but pernicious.” — p. 7.

Similar opinions are entertained by the body physician of the Pasha of Egypt, by the British Consul at Alexandria, by Mr. Abbot, Dr. Laidlaw, and others, who have been long familiar with the disease.

Not the least startling part of Dr. Bowring’s pamphlet relates to a subject in which many of our readers may have had occasion to feel a personal interest.

“The fact is, the Quarantine establishments are, for the most part, instruments, and terrible instruments, of diplomacy and state policy. Under the plea of a regard for the public health, all letters are opened, all travellers are arrested and imprisoned, all commodities are subject to regulations the most unintelligible, costly, and vexatious.” “If there be a spot in the world, placed beyond the control of public opinion, it is a Lazzaret. Believed, as it is, to be an invention for public security, the tyranny, the extortions, the injuries, which are inflicted within it, escape all animadversion.”

Something of this evil we have ourselves experienced. It was not a matter of surprise to us, that, during the prevalence of cholera in some parts of Europe, the jealous and timid rulers of Italy should tie up their petty states with cordons and prohibitions ; we were not much astonished, when the guard pointed his musket at our travelling companion, for stepping too near the line of the papal dominion, after having crossed into Tuscany ; — for all this was congenial with the habits of their governments in other matters. But to be arrested like felons in the harbour of *Marseilles* ; to be huddled like brute animals within the bare walls of a dreary prison ; still worse, to see the distress occasioned among some of our fel-

low travellers, one of whom was hastening home to die, if she might, in her own land ; and to know that all this annoyance, all this suffering, was utterly unnecessary and idle ; to hear it alleged, as a sufficient reason, that it was fair to retaliate on those coming from Italy the embarrassments thrown in the way of those who would enter it ; — these recollections have made us rejoice in any attempt to expose abuses, which may be tenfold worse under the sway of Oriental despotism, than in the most cowardly and tyrannical of European governments. We hope, that the government of England will appoint a commission to investigate the subjects brought into notice by Dr. Bowring, as is recommended by the British Association ; believing, that it may do much to promote at once the cause of humanity and of science.

2. — *A History of the First Church and Parish in Dedham. In Three Discourses, delivered on Occasion of the Completion, November 18th, 1838, of the Second Century since the gathering of said Church.* By ALVAN LAMSON, D. D., Pastor of the First Church in Dedham. Dedham. 1839. 8vo. pp. 104.

THESE belong to that valuable class of commemorative discourses, which are called out by the return of centennial and annual occasions, the object of which is, in the language of Dr. Lamson, “not so much a discourse, as a history, embracing such incidents and biographical notices, as may seem appropriate and useful.” It is well that such should be not only preached for the instruction and pleasure of those most nearly interested, but put in a permanent form for more extensive and more lasting use. “The ecclesiastical history of New England is yet to be written; and, if it is ever executed in a style worthy of the subject, it can only be by the aid of authentic details of the religious affairs of towns and parishes.” The commemorative discourses of the pulpit are therefore preparing the way for the future achievement of that great task. The least important has its value. Even the quaint, odd, trifling details extracted from the old church records, seemingly of no interest but to some hungry antiquaries, will be found to have their use in enabling the inquirer to understand more truly the character and spirit of the times and the men, and so make a truer portraiture of them. The history of the country, no less than that of the church, may be essentially aided from these sources. It was a remark of the first President Adams, that, in order to